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SANTA ROSA, NEW MEXICO

By OTTO GOETZ

THE melodious designations given by the early conquistadores to topographical features and localities of Spain's former colonial empire, our great Southwest, still grace our geographies. Although Santa Rosa does not share this distinction of antiquity, its name harmonizes with the ancient appellations.

The city by the Pecos river, county seat of Guadalupe county, did not exist when Antonio de Espejo with his fifteen soldiers and the Franciscan monk Beltrán returned to Chihuahua in 1583 from his exploration of the vast lands called New Mexico. His troops named the Pecos, "The River of Cows," on account of the great herds of buffalo which they encountered.

Gaspar Castaña de Sosa, Vice-Governor of Nuevo León, came north along the river in 1590 leading one hundred and seventy prospective settlers on his unauthorized expedition to attempt the colonization of the region.

Neither they nor subsequent explorers and adventurers in their wildest dreams could have visioned a city in this locality. All Indian pueblos were situated on strategic elevations near fertile valleys, and the Spaniards followed this example.

The Santa Rosa of to-day is a modern community, enjoying up-to-date public utilities, including a pure water supply, and an excellent school system. Located on the Southern Pacific and Rock Island, a transcontinental railroad, and U. S. Highway 66, also several state roads, it is a trade cen-

ter of an extensive territory and a primary wool market and livestock shipping point.

Half a century ago no more desolate spot could have been found in the then-Territory of New Mexico than the immediate vicinity of the Southern Pacific R. R. bridge across the Pecos River. The area is not a desert, for a stream flows through the land, although most of the time it was an innocent little creek, its waters being diverted farther up the river to irrigate the farmlands of numerous towns and villages. Now and then the Pecos, swollen by freshets or the run-off from the northern snow-clad mountains, went on the rampage, thus maintaining its classification as a river. There were some springs but their waters were charged with gypsum, tasting something like Epsom salts and equally as potent. Tall grass grew in abundance looking like a New England meadow on a frosty morning, only that the crystalline formation on the blades and white covering of the soil was the alkali seeping from the ground.

East of the river and about one mile south of the present railroad bridge, Don Celso Baca y Baca's adobe hacienda was the most prominent object of the landscape; and facing it across the road to Puerto de Luna, the then-county seat of Guadalupe county,¹ was a chapel also constructed of sun-dried bricks; beneath its floor Doña Rosa Viviana Baca y Baca, Don Celso Baca y Baca's deceased wife, was laid to rest. The little church was named in her honor, "Capilla de Santa Rosa." Many stories were told as to the wealth of the Baca family hidden within the sanctuary.

West of the Pecos river and a short distance south of the Santa Rosa of to-day, the Agua Negra Grant's 17,631 acres constituted the largest private land holding in the neighborhood. This extensive tract of land was originally allotted to Antonio Sandoval on November 24, 1824, by the

1. Guadalupe County created out of part of San Miguel County by the Legislative Assembly of the Territory of New Mexico in 1891, with Puerto de Luna designated as the county seat. First county commissioners Roman Dodge, Nathilde Chavez and Placido Baca. By act of the Legislature of 1903 Quay and Roosevelt counties were constituted out of portions of Guadalupe County, and the name of the latter changed to Leonard Wood County with Santa Rosa as the county seat. In 1906 the Legislative Assembly changed the name of the county from Leonard Wood to the original name Guadalupe County.

Republic of Mexico through the then Governor of New Mexico, Bartolome Baca (1822-25). He was the third governor of New Mexico under the Mexican Republic, ignoring the short interim of less than one year (1822-23) of General Iturbide's reign as Emperor Augustine I of Mexico. The grant was confirmed by the Congress of the United States on January 21, 1860, establishing the acreage therein, constituting a square with the Agua Negra Spring its center, its waters flowing into the Pecos river, under the name of the Rito de Agua Negra. It was from this spring as the central starting point that the dimension of the grant was determined; one league (2.63 miles) north and south, and one league east and west of horizontal and perpendicular lines drawn through the center of the spring. Mexico inherited its land measurements from the mother country Spain.

Don Celso Baca y Baca, as well as several other parties, had an interest in this grant. On this unfenced land and overflowing on the surrounding public domain, the cattle, sheep, horses and burros of the owners as well as near-by neighboring herds grazed. Early in 1888 a suit for partition of the grant was filed in the District Court of San Miguel County (in which the grant was then located), entitled Spiegelberg, plaintiff vs. Robert H. Longwill, Celso Baca, Lorenzo Labadie, Viviana Villanueva Baca, wife of Celso Baca, and Royitas Labadie, wife of Lorenzo Labadie. While the case was pending several other parties were named as additional defendants, and divers claimants made their appearance. The case was not decided until 1901; the court being unable to partition the grant, ordered it sold and the receipts disbursed according to the respective interests determined. Brigham and John H. Hicks were the purchasers.

Being strictly a stock-raising district, the entire population could have been counted as a few dozen scattered over the widely-separated ranches. It was a tranquil, pastoral region, its peaceful serenity being only occasionally disturbed by the traditional Sunday night bailes at Don Celso Baca y Baca's hospitable hacienda when the fiddle and accordion lured the dancers from far and wide to enjoy this weekly social gathering. There also were the yearly roundups when

the yelling of the cowboys, the lowing of the cows and the bawling of the branded calves broke the silence of the pastures; and during shearing and lambing time when the bleating of the sheep, the plaintive Spanish songs of the herders and shearers, accompanied by the tunes of *harmónicas* could be heard until the wee hours of the morning.

All this peaceful leisurely existence intermingled with later events represents a picture of New Mexico, the land of constant transition, where the centuries meet, and the trails of yester-years cross the modern highways of to-day, where grandeur and sublimity often border on the grotesque and oddities of creation.

With surprising swiftness the landscape and even the pastoral life of the country was transformed into feverish activity. Surveying crews invaded the region to stake out the right-of-way for the proposed Rock Island and El Paso Northwestern railways, to meet at the Pecos river about a mile north of Don Celso Baca y Baca's hacienda. The embryonic station was named Santa Rosa. The honor thus bestowed on the memory of Doña Viviana Villanueva Baca assuaged any ill feeling which the Baca family may have harbored against the invaders of their domain.²

The mere designation of Santa Rosa as the junction point of the two important railroad systems was sufficient to bring the immediate influx of the gentry usually following railroad construction, augmented by colleagues from the then-declining mining camps of Bland and Elizabethtown. A tent town came into being, the more pretentious establishments consisting of four or five boards nailed horizontally on some uprights, and these over-spanned with a tent. Thus the settlement was composed of a score or more saloons with their associated enterprises, lunch counters in the rear of the places and tables for poker players scattered about. Tinhorn gamblers and others making their living by their

2. There were other ranch interests in the vicinity of Santa Rosa: P. R. Page, Lorenzo Labadie, W. B. Giddings. Contrary to the wide-spread opinion that everyone welcomes a railroad, let it be said here that such is not the case with the stock-raising industry. Railroads bring settlers whose homesteads diminish the grazing lands, a train occasionally kills stock, and the sparks escaping from the engine often start prairie fires which destroy the grass and even burn down fences.

wits came from all sections of the Union. The sale of liquor was indeed the principal occupation of these ground-floor pioneers. Perhaps the dubious quality of the drinking water helped to enhance the liquor consumption. Water was brought to town first at \$1.00 per barrel, and later when competition increased at 75c per barrel.

Rapidly the construction camps gathered their crews; in a short time there were more than four thousand workers engaged in cutting a roadbed through the hills, filling canyons and excavating new channels for the flood waters to escape. Giant blasts removing obstructions rocked the country-side at intervals. For all these people Santa Rosa became a metropolis, trading point and recreation center. Lon Reed and Bill Hunter, two old-time cattlemen of Guadalupe county established a slaughter house to supply the camps with beef; they also operated a wagon-yard, corral and feed stable in connection therewith. Marsh and Dubois and the Moise Brothers opened general merchandise stores. Eating houses, blacksmith shops and laundries came into existence to cater to the demands of the ever-increasing population. Santa Rosa became a regular frontier town, a thriving community. Mail as well as all supplies was hauled in from Las Vegas, a distance of seventy miles. Mail came at first twice a week via Anton Chico, Las Colonias and Casaus by a four-horse stage line. The route was later changed to the crossing of the Pecos at the Juan Pais ranch where the stage stopped for dinner, and the mail was dispatched for Las Colonias and Anton Chico by horseback. Aside from the four horses used by the stage and the ponies of the cowboys, also mules used in the construction camps, burros had a monopoly on the transportation system; they hauled freight, supplies, wood and water to the town. In fact there was an over-population of burros. Celso Baca y Baca had a herd estimated all the way from several hundred to a thousand or more. They were branded with a large B on the left flank and a large C on the shoulder. Led by a white jack these marauders invaded the town day and night, upset garbage and water barrels, broke into corrals and consumed the hay intended for the horses. They finally became

such a nuisance that the citizens took some drastic measures to rid the community of their presence. Old roofing iron and tin cans were tied to the burros, then with a liberal application of highlife they were bidden adieu. The burros left the inhospitable community; some years later their presence was reported in the Manzano mountains 100 miles west of Santa Rosa.

The post office was originally located in a small room at the Celso Baca y Baca hacienda. The incoming mail was dumped into an oblong clothes basket and it was up to everyone to fish out what belonged to him. Since letters and papers accumulated in this basket for some years, it became quite a task and time-consuming undertaking to get possession of one's mail. The citizens finally tiring of this primitive method, took the post office to the store of Marsh and Dubois, a procedure not mentioned in postal laws and regulations. The moving of the post office had its beneficial influence on the town's development. It now began to spread toward the east, while formerly it consisted of a single street stretching south.

Nor did the community lack picturesque characters who would to-day make outstanding figures in a western movie. There was Cherokee Dora who could outcuss any muleskinner, ride any horse which would carry a saddle, and hold her own in a drinking bout; a bronco-buster who stayed in the saddle despite all the gymnastic performances of her mount. She was equally proficient with the rope and branding iron. Broad-brimmed black sombrero, jacket, short divided skirt, high cowboy boots with spurs, a full cartridge belt with her ivory-handled forty-five six shooter hanging in the holster, she made a formidable appearance. No one knew anything of her background, and inasmuch as it was unethical to ask such questions, the Indian woman always remained a mystery.

An explosion killed one or two men in the construction camps, several others were seriously injured, and medical supplies were urgently needed. The nearest place where they could be obtained was Las Vegas. Dora volunteered to make the trip, 65 miles across the country each way. She

started late in the afternoon and returned early the next morning, delivering the supplies to Dr. M. F. Des Marais, the attending surgeon, having made the ride both ways on the same horse, an incredible feat that caused many to say "impossible." Quite a different type was ladylike Inna who was an excellent bronco buster and trained horses to follow their master and kneel to permit a lady to mount. It was believed that she had some hypnotic influence over the wildest beast. No one knew Inna's identity; some claimed she was a Spaniard, others that she was of Indian extraction, but everyone had a great admiration for her horsemanship. Six-shooter Fannie, also of undetermined race or nationality, followed no particular occupation aside from getting drunk once or twice a month, and her insistence on these occasions to shoot up the town in regular western fashion. Since her shots were all directed into the blue sky, there was no particular objection to her amusement. Rather odd but ordinarily peaceful was Dolly, an almost perfect albino. All these would emphasize Rudyard Kipling's assertion that "The female of the species is more terrific than the male."

The construction crews were a motley assembly of races and nationalities from all sections of the United States: Swedes, Danes, Norwegians, Italians, Native Spanish-Americans, Mexicans from our southern sister republic, Negroes, Indians from the New Mexico pueblos, and divers crews of other nationals. Among the latter the Dalmations were the most remarkable: robust, tall men, very industrious and sober, they wore number 12 and 13 shoes (this should give an idea of their size). Perhaps it was these qualities and characteristics which induced the Roman army to select one of their countrymen, Diocletian, as emperor of the Roman Empire in 284 A. D.

Of course the town had a deputy sheriff who was supposed to maintain law and order, but he was a conscientious objector to exposing his person to any chance of violence or to even being present where circumstances indicated trouble might develop. It therefore became necessary for the citizens to protect their own rights and property and maintain some semblance of order. Saloons had regular hangers-on

called "rollets," presumably derived from their occupation of rolling drunks over to pilfer their pockets of whatever change might accidentally remain therein. Cardsharks and tinhorns stripped the would-be poker players swiftly of their stakes. Horses and buggys were stolen while their owners entered a store or saloon. Those caught were guarded by the citizens in shifts from two to three hours. Sometimes their punishment was eviction from town, other times more severe. Violent drunks were simply chained to a tree until they became tractable, but there is no case on record where the treatment produced a permanent cure. Cries of "Help" were frequently heard during the night, but the population had become hard-boiled, "just another drunk" and no attention paid. If there were any fatalities they passed unnoticed. The construction workers were men without families whose disappearance caused no particular inquiry. The court records show only one murder for the period, and that not a premeditated homicide.

Finally the citizens secured the services of an experienced peace officer to be paid by public subscription. The first night on duty he was shot through the neck but recovered, and the town enjoyed at least some protection. He left town for parts unknown after serving only a short time. It was reported that he took with him two trunks full of fire arms gathered in the pursuit of his official duties.

Last but not least among the town's notorious characters was "Jim." Jim was a fawn-colored burro colt, the most friendly and sociable specimen of his tribe; an aristocrat in burrodom, he disdained association with his own kindred and bestowed all his affection on humanity. This caused his moral downfall and delinquency, for the boys taught him to drink beer. The donkey took to the habit like a fish to water; he learned to enter a saloon of his own volition, nose his way to the bar where a dish was set before him and soon filled by the contributions from the glasses of the patrons and liberal donations from the bar-tender. Often a more free-hearted customer treated Jim to an entire bottle, whereupon the burro held this in his jaw, lifted his head and let the brew gurgle down his throat with apparent relish. Jim was

a welcome visitor at any bar for wherever the burro went a crowd soon followed to watch his antics. After making the rounds of the different establishments and consuming his quota, when his wobbly legs would no longer sustain his body, he would lie down to sleep off his debauch inside a saloon or in the street. This nearly cost him his life; lying thus one day in the road a teamster with a load of lumber becoming impatient after vain efforts to get the burro to move, drove his wagon over the unconscious Jim. Immediately an angry crowd gathered, for the donkey was everybody's pet. The declaration of one of the by-standers that only Jim's leg was broken and he could set it, was all that saved the driver from violence; however, he was compelled to pay a fine of \$20 before he was allowed to go on his way. The donkey, raised on a tripod to take the weight from his injured leg, became a teetotaler. Nothing but water quenched his thirst and there was hope for his reformation. But when finally restored to normal and the corral gate opened to free him, all his good resolutions went to naught. After breaking into a hilarious hee-haw he started for the nearest booze joint. Alas, Jim was a backslider, a confirmed drunkard; he returned to his old sinful ways, one spree after another interrupted only by short periods of sobering-up to regain the locomotion of his legs. A regular town bum, mooching drinks wherever he could.

Still Santa Rosa emerged from its frontier days' experiences into an orderly community. In addition to the general merchandise establishments of Marsh and Dubois, and the Moise Bros., as well as the other enterprises in operation, Geo. H. Smith and Tom Melaven opened stores. Dr. Van Patten opened a drug store, E. G. Cooper brought out the first edition of the *Santa Rosa Star*, giving the town its pioneer newspaper. Mr. Cooper is now living in Santa Fe and has a valuable collection of photos of the early Santa Rosa. The business section of the town moved to the new town-site east of the old tent village along the railroad right-of-way. Here H. B. Jones established the Guadalupe County Savings Bank. Another early arrival in Santa Rosa was Judge E. R. Wright, now residing in Santa Fe. The Judge,

an outstanding attorney, a member of the Territorial Court in 1910 and 1911, and sole survivor of the territorial judges, has made his home in Santa Fe for ten years and contributed much towards the development of the city. He is an authority on the early history of Santa Rosa and other settlements in the eastern part of the state. The writer of this is under great obligations to the judge for much of the information and data contained in this story.³

It was on December 26, 1901, that the citizens and people from the surrounding country gathered at the right-of-way to see the first train brought into Santa Rosa; from the east an engine came puffing, pushing flat cars loaded with ties and rails. These were laid in place and the train proceeded until it reached the river. Material for the bridge was also brought by the Rock Island train. The El Paso North Eastern did not reach the bridge until February 2, 1902.

Santa Rosa was now connected with the outside world by rail, its wild and woolly days at an end. The tent town disappeared, its denizens silently departing for greener pastures, and the construction camps became deserted. It was the birth of a city, a new era of progress and achievement.

No less turbulent was the neighborhood of Santa Rosa; the construction of the railroad brought hundreds of families into the country looking for farmlands. Who could resist the alluring offer of the government, a 160 acre homestead for a filing fee of only \$16, or ten cents per acre. All they had to do was to stay on the land for five years, cultivate part thereof and make some improvements. These prospective settlers dreamed of monster wheat crops, the railroad being at their front doors to transport it to the market. In five years when they received title to the land it would be worth \$100 per acre. They fenced their lands,

3. It is to be regretted that proper credit cannot be given to the pioneers whose efforts and labors contributed to the upbuilding of Santa Rosa. Many names have been forgotten, men and women who played a prominent part in the city's development and have moved to parts unknown or have obeyed the last call. Among those still surviving are J. W. Wood, residing in Santa Rosa, and C. H. Stearns, now living in Albuquerque. Mr. Stearns was the agent and representative of the townsite company for some time, later succeeded by Judge E. R. Wright who held that position until the company disposed of its holdings to H. B. and C. R. Jones.

built houses, barns and corrals. With each day the fences encroached more and more on the grazing territory of the stockmen. This brought about the inevitable clash between the conflicting interests, the new-comers called nesters, and the cattle and sheep raisers. The nesters at first in the minority rapidly increased in numbers by additional home-seekers coming from many states. Finally the nesters became so numerous that they gained the upper hand; cattle straying into their fields were killed and this drove the stockmen to desperation. Woe to the cattleman who strayed into the domain of the nesters, and vice versa to the nester who wandered into the yet-existing grazing lands. For awhile it looked as if the stock-raising industry would be completely obliterated. But the settlers did not include one factor in their calculations, the utterly deficient rainfall of the region. Slowly they departed, some penniless, returning to their old homes a disillusioned people. As one witty Irishman summed up the situation, Uncle Sam is willing to bet you 160 acres against \$16 that you can't stay on one of these homesteads for five years without starving to death. In a short time the houses and barns disappeared, used for kindling wood; the fence posts served the same purpose and nearly every vestige of the invasion of the homesteaders became obliterated.

The chapel still stands opposite the renovated Celso Baca y Baca house. The sanctuary would make an ideal museum, being the last resting place of the lady after whom the city was named.

Astonishing is the transformation which has taken place. The once desolate region has become a scenic attraction. Those who laid out the city should be complimented on the wide streets, permitting the traffic from the several highways, of which Santa Rosa is the hub, to freely circulate. Substantial buildings line the streets of the business section, including the Guadalupe County Court House, schoolhouses and other public structures in landscaped grounds. Shade-trees fringe the avenues in the residential section, with dwellings surrounded by lawns and gardens.

The city's greatest attraction however are the numerous

lakes in its vicinity; nature itself attending to the beauty of their environment with grotesque rock formations, trees and shrubbery. Some of them are used as fish hatcheries.

Many theories have been advanced as to the origin of these lakes; surface indications seem to support the belief that all are fed from some common underground water-source, a mother flow, and are connected by subterranean channels. It is believed that the outcropping upper strata of sand-stone is underlaid with a softer limestone formation through which the waters by percolation and erosion have forced their way to the surface. According to soundings taken, some of these lakes are regarded as bottomless.

The most picturesque is the "Blue Hole," its indigo blue waters being overshadowed by a stratified natural sandstone wall on the east side; it is 81 feet deep, 100 feet wide, and discharges 3,000 gallons of water per minute at a temperature of 62 degrees.

Santa Rosa may well be called "The City of the Lakes."